The Madras Law Journal

VOL. XXVI] JANUARY, 1914. [PART I

THE LATE MR. JUSTICE P. R. SUNDARA AIYAR.

It is with profound regret that we have to record the death, on the 21st of December last, of Mr. Justice Sundara Aiyar, who was one of the founders of this journal and continued to be one of its editors for a period of 20 years. He was born in June 1862 at Pudukode, a village near Palghat. His parents belonged to a very humble station in life, and he had to contend with poverty during the scholastic period of his life. The success he achieved during his academic career and in life was entirely due to his own intellectual endowments and force of character. He was one of the most distinguished graduates of the Madras Christian College and was a favourite of Dr. William Miller, the famous Educationist of Southern India. He took up logic and philosophy as his special subject for the B. A., degree and was a tutor in that subject for a period of 2 years after graduation. The habit of logical reasoning and close analysis and the remarkable facility in exposition that he acquired during this period were of the greatest possible value to him in his legal studies and in his future career. He pursued the study of law with ardour, and during his two years' course for the B. L., degree laid the foundation of a knowledge of law as deep as it was broad. He passed the B. L., examination with distinction and became an apprentice under Sir (then Mr.) Subramaniya Aiyar, who was then occupying a foremost position in the Madras Bar. It may be said that his apprenticeship under Sir S. Subramaniya Aiyar was the turning point of his career and that his struggle with poverty then came to an end. Sir S. Subramaniya Aiyar was quick to recognise the talents of his pupil and generous in his appreciation. Sir Subramaniya Aiyar lost no opportunity of helping his pupil and warmly commending him to his large *clientele* throughout the

Presidency. Junior engagements fast came to Mr. Sundara Aiyar almost from the date of his enrolment. Sir Subramaniya Aiyar had so much confidence in the abilities of his distinguished pupil that when he was not able to attend personally to his cases, he often handed them over to Mr. Sundara Aiyar. Mr. Sundara Aiyar had not to wait long before he acquired an independent footing in the profession. His close association with Sir Subramaniya Aiyar during these early years was attended with the most fruitful intellectual intercourse. It was during this period that an informal association was formed in Mylapore for the purpose of discussing topics of law. The association included all the leading lights of the Bar and the most promising juniors.—Sir V. Bashyam Iyengar, Sir S. Subramaniya Aiyar, Mr. C. Ramachandra Rao Saheb, Mr. C. R. Pattabirama Aiyar, Sir C. Sankaran Nair, Mr. T. Subba Rao, Mr. P. S. Sivaswami Aiyar, Mr. V. Krishnaswami Aiyar, Mr. P. R. Sundara Aiyar, and Sir V C. Desikachariar. The members met every Saturday noon at Sir Subramaniya Iyer's house at the Luz, and the decided cases in the Indian Law Reports were the subject of discussion. Every decision of importance was thoroughly dissected, examined and discussed in all possible aspects. No decision of a doubtful or questionable character was passed over unchallenged. No deference was paid to any decision that could not be supported by an appeal to principles. It need hardly be said that the weekly discussions were of a most stimulating character and promoted thought and study. The gathering was looked forward to as an intellectual feast. Mr. Sundara Aiyar used to take a prominent part in these debates. It was at this time that the idea of starting the Madras Law Journal was conceived, and it was decided to commit the undertaking to the care of Mr. Salem Ramaswami Mudaliar, Mr. C. Sankaran Nair, Mr. V. Krishnaswami Aiyar and Mr. P. R. Sundara Aiyar. Several of the leaders and the critical notes in the Journal in the early years of its existence owed their inspiration to the weekly discussions. Mr. Sundara Aiyar's editorial connection with the Law Journal helped not a little to spread his reputation as a lawyer. When Sir S. Subramaniya Aiyar was elevated to the Bench of the High Court in 1895, a large portion of his practice was divided between Mr. Sundara Aiyar and Mr. V. Krishnaswami Aiyar. Mr. Sundara Aiyar's position in the Bar had, by this time, been thoroughly well-established and more briefs poured in upon him than he could conveniently accept. Thoroughly conscientious worker as

he was, his engagements compelled him to work at very high pressure and left him little time for rest or physical exercise. Mr. Sundara Aiyar was naturally endowed with a robust constitution, and like the late Mr. Krishnaswami Aiyar and other men similarly endowed, he committed the fatal mistake of ignoring physical limitations and imagining that his constitution could stand the strain of any amount of work. The strenuous work of these years undermined his hardy constitution, and he contracted the disease to which so many educated Indians become victims. As an advocate, Mr. Sundara Aiyar was distinguished for the thoroughness with which he prepared his cases, the care he took to arrange the facts, the lucidity with which he presented them and the readiness with which he met his opponents' points. The skilful presentation of a case is an art which is but little attended to but which Mr. Sundara Aiyar carefully cultivated. He had a very exacting conception of the equipment of an advocate, and he conscientiously and successfully strove to reach his own high ideals. He had an excellent delivery and a powerful and well-modulated voice to which it was a pleasure to listen. There was little literary embellishment in his style, but he spoke with a directness and a force and earnestness which made every sentence tell upon his hearers. His manners towards his opponents were generally dignified and free from unpleasantness. With his talents and advocacy, he had no difficulty in commanding the respectful attention of every Judge with whom he had to deal. He had a high sense of duty to his client. When the late Mr. V. Krishnaswami Aiyar was elevated to the Executive Council, Mr. Sundara Aiyar's appointment to succeed him gave universal satisfaction. He had all the qualifications required to achieve judicial eminence, and the courtesy and patient hearing that he accorded to the practitioners who appeared before him were most marked. He was ambitious of leaving a name as a great Judge and his judgments are marked by erudition, research, subtlety and exhaustiveness. It is a matter for deep regret that his judicial career came to an abrupt close so soon and that he was not allowed to realise his ambition to the fullest limit. His interests were not confined to his professional labours. He took great interest in education and his services on the syndicate of the Madras University were handsomely acknowledged by the Vice-chancellor Sir John Wallis. In the sphere of political activity, he was an active worker in the Madras Mahajana Sabha and the Congress Committee and his outlook was that of sober and

thoughtful patriotism. His death is an irreparable loss to the High Court he adorned and to the legal profession whose interests he had always at heart. His lectures on 'Professional Ethics' were not the least valuable of his services to the legal profession. From the conductors of this Journal a deep debt of gratitude is due to the memory of the distinguished Judge who has passed away.